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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2049  
INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS IMMEDIATE 1318  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN IMMEDIATE 0108  
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE 0258  
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN IMMEDIATE 0484  
RUEHDL/AMEMBASSY DUBLIN IMMEDIATE 0030  
RUEHHE/AMEMBASSY HELSINKI IMMEDIATE 0353  
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON IMMEDIATE 0081  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE 0179  
RUEHLE/AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG IMMEDIATE 0127  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID IMMEDIATE 0620  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE 0230  
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME IMMEDIATE 0458  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM IMMEDIATE 0503  
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE IMMEDIATE 0163  
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA IMMEDIATE 0013  
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA IMMEDIATE 0001  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SOFIA 000817

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [CU](#) [BU](#)

SUBJECT: BULGARIA: DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER'S IMPRESSIONS OF CUBA

Classified By: DCM JEFF LEVINE; E.O. 12958: REASONS  
1.4 (B) and (D)

1.(C) Summary: Deputy Foreign Minister Gergana Grancharova shared with DCM impressions from her recent trip to Cuba where she held talks with Cuban counterparts, discussed Cuba,s \$300 million debt to Bulgaria, signed a cultural exchange agreement and met with members of the Bulgarian community living there. While Mrs. Grancharova said she repeatedly raised human rights issues with government officials, she did not meet with dissidents under threat of cancellation of her official program. Cuban officials, according to Mrs. Grancharova, were candid in their analysis of Cuba,s situation and its relationship with various EU countries. Following her return, Mrs. Grancharova requested resources to provide internet access at its Embassy to Cuban citizens. End summary.

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Human Rights and Foreign Affairs  
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2.(C) During her May 29-30 visit, accompanied by four members of the America,s Directorate which she heads, Mrs. Grancharova met with Deputy Foreign Minister Cavallaro, Executive Secretary of the National Assembly Ernesto Suarez, and Deputy Minister for Investment Ricardo Guerrero. The meetings included lengthy discussions on human rights where she found the Cubans more open than expected, but suffering from siege mentality. According to Mrs. Grancharova, the Cubans are convinced that the Cuban-American community will prevent the U.S. from ever adopting a balanced approach in dealing with Cuba. The officials claimed to be ready to talk with any U.S. Administration that &will respect them.8 They are also ready for greater engagement with the European Union as long as the EU,s position &is not Washington,s position.8

3.(C) Within the EU, Mrs. Grancharova said, Cuba looks first to Spain for support, but also welcomed the &pragmatic8 approaches of the United Kingdom and Canada. The Cubans

noted that Canada is vocal in its human rights concerns, without allowing them to poison the relationship. They also identified Italy, France, Germany, Belgium and Greece as countries perceived to be more even-handed in their approach.

Outside the EU, Cuba enjoys support from Venezuela, Bolivia, China and Russia. Mrs. Grancharova stressed to the GOC that as soon as the regime allowed Cubans to freely choose their government, the international community would no longer feel the need for involvement in Cuba's internal affairs.

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The Transition  
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4.(C) Based on the visit, her first to Cuba, Mrs. Grancharova does not believe Eastern Europe's transition to democracy will be an especially viable model. A major difference, she explained, is Cuba's colonial past and then the Batista regime. Neither, she believes, provided Cuba with the exposure to functioning self-government that the Eastern European states had experienced. Next was the pride she encountered among her Cuban counterparts in some of the regime's accomplishments ) specifically its health care and educational systems. When the wall fell, there was no similar sense in Eastern Europe that parts of their system were working well. With that said, Mrs. Grancharova found general acknowledgement among her contacts that change is coming ) but not until Castro is gone.

5.(C) Mrs. Grancharova said Cubans are preparing themselves for "the day after," and she feared a peaceful transition can not be assumed. With no obvious heir apparent, any change will be surrounded by uncertainty and, likely, instability. She identified property issues as the transition area most likely to result in violence. On a more positive note, she saw signs that Cuba's tourism industry is already gearing up for the coming changes and expects one day to be hosting far more visitors, including Americans.

6.(C) While unable to meet with dissidents, Mrs. Grancharova did feel like she met numerous "ordinary Cubans," who maintain a very favorable view of Bulgaria from times past. She believes this connection can make a positive contribution when dealing with Cuba. She also met with about 80 Bulgarians living in Cuba, primarily spouses of Cuban citizens who have been there for years. The Bulgarian community there is not doing well, she acknowledged, although most of its complaints centered on economic, rather than political hardships. The high cost of exit visas for those wishing to visit Bulgaria was a specific complaint. Meetings with dissidents were scratched from her schedule when the Cubans ) who were obviously monitoring all facets of her program ) told her the official meetings would be cancelled if the dissident meetings proceeded.

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Official Schedule  
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7.(C) The official schedule included:

-- Signing of a Protocol on Cultural, Scientific and Educational exchange for 2006-2008 that includes student exchanges (two a year each direction) and cultural exhibitions (one a year each direction).

-- Preliminary work on an exchange of students between their respective diplomatic institutes.

-- An agreement to form an expert group from their ministries of finance to discuss Cuba's \$300 million debt to Bulgaria (note: a deputy finance minister later told us that Cuba recognized the debt several years ago ) but he expects little progress in actually getting them to pay).

8.(C) During her visit, Mrs. Grancharova also met with several EU Ambassadors and agreed to request funds from her

Ministry to provide internet access at their Embassy for Cubans.

9.(C) Comment: While stressing she is far from an expert on Cuban issues, Mrs. Grancharova found the visit fascinating and is committed to playing a constructive role in Cuba,s development. She believes both the EU and U.S. should be focusing on a short list of demands from the current regime while preparing to assist with the coming transition whenever it occurs. End Comment  
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